



Introduction to Ave Explores

The Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment

by Katie Prejean McGrady

On October 3, 2018, hundreds of bishops, priests, religious men and women, and lay men and women will gather in Rome for the fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment.

This historic synod addresses a remarkably important topic: how to minister to, serve, and walk with youth and young adults today, both the faithfully Catholic and those who have left their faith behind.

Nearly three years in the making, much has been done to prepare for this synod:

- surveys of young people
- meetings of experts at the Vatican
- contributions from bishops' conferences around the world
- the pre-synod meeting last March, when three hundred young adults from around the world gathered and composed a document that was presented to Pope Francis on Palm Sunday
- the work of the young adults led to the creation of the *Instrumentum Laboris* (working document) for the bishops who are gathering beginning this week.

The project of this synod is large in scope and significant for the life of the Church as a whole, not just for youth and young adults and those who minister to them.

In conjunction with the synod, Ave Maria Press is launching a new initiative called *Ave Explores*, which will take an in-depth look at issues facing the Catholic Church. The first topic in the series will be The Synod on Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment.

A team of experts comprised of Ave authors and contributors will provide insight, ideas, and resources to help unpack what's going on during—and after—the synod. Videos, articles, resource guides, and commentary will help readers understand the synod and its effects on the Church—especially for those in the fields of youth and young adult ministry, catechesis, and education—as well as parents and families.

Experts include:

- **Paul Jarzembowski**, assistant director for youth and young adult ministry at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. He is attending the synod with the USCCB's bishop delegates. Jarzembowski will support the bishops during their daily work there, as well "bring them insights from youth, campus, *pastoral juvenil hispana*, and young adult ministries across the United States."
- **Jonathan Lewis**, assistant secretary for pastoral ministry and social concerns in the Archdiocese of Washington, is a synod auditor appointed by Pope Francis. "This is the first time in our two-thousand-year history that the Pope and bishops are listening to the voices of young people and prioritizing the evangelization and missionary formation of young people," Lewis said. "I am looking forward to listening to the voices of Catholics across the world to listen to how the Holy Spirit is working in various cultures and to share the fruits of the evangelization of young people here in the US."
- **Justin McClain**, theology teacher at Bishop McNamara High School in Forestville, Maryland, and author of *Called to Teach* and *Called to Pray*. McClain said the synod is "an enormous opportunity to challenge young people to make recourse to Christ's teachings in a world increasingly opting for lives typified by sentimentality." He also hopes there will be a discussion of promoting chastity as both a possibility and a timeless ideal. McClain will share insights on how the work of the synod applies to the education and formation of young people in formal classroom settings.
- **Christopher Wesley**, director of youth and young adult ministry at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Cockeysville, Maryland, and a youth ministry coach and consultant at Marathon Youth Ministry. He is the author of *Rebuilding Youth Ministry* and *Rebuilding Confirmation*.
- **Joel Stepanek**, director of resource development for Life Teen and author of the forthcoming *Chasing Humility*.
- **Roy Petitfils**, Catholic speaker, author of the forthcoming *Helping Teens with Stress, Anxiety, and Depression*, and a psychotherapist in private practice.

We invite you to walk with us on this synod journey so that you can understand the pastoral implications of the work being done by the attendees in Rome and to begin to prepare for how best to implement the initiatives presented by the world's bishops.



Katie Prejean McGrady is coordinating Ave Explores. She attended the March pre-synod meeting in Rome as one of three US delegates for the USCCB. Prejean McGrady is a full-time Catholic speaker and the author of *Room 24 and Follow*, and the coauthor of the forthcoming *Lent with her husband, Tommy*.